



Write in Mindful Ways

The following points are extracted with little or no modification from the work of Robert Boice, 2000, *Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 319 pp.

1. **Wait mindfully...** pause reflectively to begin work in the moment and to resist old habits of rushing impulsively into prose. Set the stage for writing to come and loosen blocking.
2. **Begin writing early, before feeling ready...** prewriting, conceptual outlining, imaging that soon become prose and complete manuscripts.
3. **Work with mindful constancy and moderation...** in brief, daily sessions and, after each, with ongoing awareness of what you will write the next session.
 - When writers work on daily projects—even very briefly—the ideas stay fresh in mind from day to day; so less warm up time is needed before writing the next day.
 - Brief daily sessions (BDSs) allow time and energy for interludes of “near writing” at other times of the day—for noticing things that relate to writing, for collecting and noting things that induce more imaginativeness and clearer organization.
 - The habit of writing every day helps make the work more welcome, less a struggle.
 - BDSs mean shorter, less fatiguing sessions of work.
 - Because they eventually provide a realistic sense of doing enough and of progressing fast enough, brief daily sessions help reduce pressures to write quickly and perfectly in first drafts.
 - BDSs help writers learn how to work proficiently, like real writers, and to feel like real writers.
 - Because they are brief, BDSs fit into already busy schedules.
 - Brief, daily sessions are more productive, creative, and successful in the long run than writing in spurts and binges.
4. **Stop...** in a timely fashion... before a product orientation and its rushing subverts your process mode of writing. When we cannot stop because of the short-term rewards of continuing, we binge. That often means that the next day or two must be devoted to work other than writing, or maybe a needed rest.
5. **Balance preliminaries with writing...** by spending as much time and energy on prewriting as on prose. Mindful writers start with a dominance of prewriting and

gradually reduce its role into the latter stages of working where they use it only to prime final drafting and revising.

6. Let go of negative thinking...by noticing disruptive, distracting thoughts while writing and moderating them until you can write directly from mental images, without much intermediate thinking. Some counterproductive examples are from new faculty who:

- Thought perfectionistically and so prematurely concluded they could not write well enough.
- Dwelt on prospects of criticism or rejection and they wanted to avoid writing.
- Let internal censors haunt their thinking as they wrote, inhibiting them from proceeding beyond narrow, premature attention to things like spelling, grammar, and style.
- Thought of writing as unbearably difficult and unrewarding and so they opted for things easier and quicker.
- Thought they knew enough about what they would write to excuse rushing into prose (without conceptual outlining and other prewriting) and so found themselves stumbling and lost.
- Getting farther behind in their writing, thought it emphasized product over process. With that imbalance came another: A tendency to consider the process of working at writing mysterious, one better left unexamined.

7. Moderate emotions... particularly the strong euphoria of writing in binges (and the depression that follows it). This pattern co-relates with less output and quality of writing in the long run and more long-term difficulties in writing, including blocking.

8. Moderate attachments...chiefly by way of seeking out and listening mindfully to criticism; secondarily by learning to work with a sense of humor and mindful distancing from the work, particularly in its formative stages. Fluent and healthy new faculty writers displayed:

- A calm and gentle letting go of concern about always gaining the approval of everyone else,
- Contentment with staying and working in the moment, mainly for the discovery, and
- A sense of humor about their own foibles as writers

9. Let others do some of the work...by learning from their criticisms, by employing their suggestions for improvement, by collaborating with them. Compared to others, exemplars, who themselves struggle with the ideas:

- Encourage more observation and criticism of their work, especially early in the planning process.

- Collaborate more often and are quick to explain reasons for doing so (e.g. collaborators share the work and thus improve the product; they also help reduce the chances of fatal mistakes in manuscripts).
- Acquire a sense of audience that includes awareness of social conventions and ongoing conversations.

10. Limit wasted effort... by noticing whether you are solving the right problems, by seeing the savings in terms of time and energy, and by arranging more “success experiences” and their resulting resilience. Mindful writers simplify their work (and so waste less effort) in ways now familiar:

- They devote only moderate amounts of time to writing each day (and so continue to write amid unusually busy or distracting days because the writing takes little time).
- They write in brief sessions that require little warm-up time (and so the writing is not as difficult to get underway as it is for others).
- Their writing habits include acts of pausing and slowing that keep the writing on track, more succinct, and more satisfying.
- Their pauses also encourage stopping in time to permit other daily activities, such as socializing and exercising (thus with time to do other things, there are fewer excuses for not writing that day).
- They’ve prewritten, planned, and approximated enough so that prose writing goes quickly (thus, they work with with comfort and happiness that minimize associations between writing and pain/exhaustion).
- They routinely practice ways of treating inevitable interruptions with calm and tolerance, either by returning to the present moment and its process orientation of working, or, when that is impractical, as by taking breaks and gaining perspective on what they were writing.
- These resilient writers welcome criticism, learn and grow in it, and moderate reactions to it; they let other people, including critics, do some of the work of writing, even as agents of discipline (e.g. with partners waiting for their appearance at joint writing sessions, writers taking fewer days off).
- They work mindfully, toward mastery but they tolerate failures and mediocrities along the way with patience and humor (and so remain more process-oriented in the moment, while experiencing—and letting go of—distractions and pain).
- They produce more writing in less time because they work with an economy of action.